

February 12, 2023

The Sixth Sunday after Epiphany

Pastor Matt Duerr

“The Road Less Travelled-Atonement Avenue”

We're still in the Epiphany, we're still dealing with making Christ manifest, and we're still following the road less traveled; that is the Old Testament. Again, a quick recap. We began with Genesis looking at creation and how we sinned and God promised that He would provide a Messiah. From there we traveled to The Harsh Truth Highway - the flood. God doesn't wink at sin, He condemns it. And since the heart of man is deceitful above all things and all the intentions of his heart were evil God judged. But with that judgment, He also gave the rainbow; a covenant revealing that He is a God of covenants. That took us to Lineage Lane where we see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, Jesse, David; all in the lineage of Jesus. But it is part of the covenant; a covenant that God has established with Abraham when he said in short- leave three for me and I will bless you with seven. And that seventh one was that “in you all nations will be blessed.” Again, a reference to the Messiah.

Last week we took a quick trip down Deliverance Drive. We saw God deliver the people out of Egypt; but that led us to Passover Parkway where we saw Christ in the Passover. And today, we take a little journey down Atonement Avenue.

We begin in Leviticus chapter 16, where the stage is set for atonement day or Yom Kippur. We read in chapter 16, verse one the Lord spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron when they drew near before the Lord and died. What? What happened? Well we have to go back to Leviticus 10, verses one to three to see what happened. The two sons of Aaron the high priest took it upon themselves to quote, “offer profane fire before the Lord which he had not commanded.” They decided to approach God their way and the result, again I quote, “fire went out from the Lord and devoured them.” You see they didn't understand worship isn't about us. It's about God and doing it His way. Paul writes to the people of Corinth in First Corinthians 14:33 who were following

the practices of Nadab and Abihu, and worshipping any which way they thought was right. He tells them, “for God is not a God of confusion or disorder but of peace, or order, and he then commends them and tells them to worship God in an acceptable manner, in an orderly way.” Lesson one is- how we approach God really does matter.

And so when we come before Him in prayer, we ought to look at what he says about it. We come saying “our Father.” Unfortunately for us today, Hollywood has made a mockery of fathers, presenting them as stumbling fools. But in the Bible, fathers are to be respected because a huge burden has been put on their shoulders to bring up their children in the way of the Lord.

And secondly, how we approach God in worship matters. We are to come reverently, respectfully, glorifying God, and well bringing us back to Leviticus, let's make this orderly. That's exactly what God does. He makes coming before Him very orderly for the day of atonement or Yom Kippur.

First off there's a specific date. That's very orderly. It's on the 10th day of the 7th month which is Tishery. Notice again the numbers-10 is complete, the complete time has passed during the year. Seven is a number of perfection. The 7th month is the perfect month. At this time the holy priest was to come to the Tabernacle and bring with him a bull as a sin offering and a ram as a burnt offering. Now in your bulletin we've bought a diagram of the Tabernacle. You might want to take a look at that so that you can see what was happening here.

Once in the Tabernacle the high priest would wash at the basin or the laver. Once he had washed he would then go into the holy place where he would dress. He would put on a white linen undergarment. He would put on a white linen tunic; that's why I wear a white one. He would put on a white linen sash; I don't have a linen sash, but I have a white robe. And he would put on a white linen turban. I thought of putting on my cowboy hat but it's black, so I didn't do that. So, we'll just go with my white hair. But that's why I'm not wearing a stole today. It was very

simple you wash you cleanse yourself. You come simply before God because we are the created.

Once he was dressed in this simple attire, he'd go back out into the courtyard and he would take from the congregation two goats for sin offerings, and a ram for a burnt offering. At that time, at the altar there in the courtyard, he would sacrifice the bull, the one that he had brought to make atonement for himself and the priests. He would then enter the holy place with the blood of that bull, with some incense that was finally made according to the directions that God gave, and with some coals from that altar. He would go to the altar of incense which was right in front of the most holy place, and there he would burn the incense and the smoke would go up and over the veil (or the curtain of separation) making the most holy place or the holy of holies cloudy. And then the high priest would go into the most holy place. God had told him that He would be in the cloud; the cloud of the incense smoke above the mercy seat. As we've talked many times before God uses physical elements to come to us in this physical world.

Once he was in that most holy place, the high priest, he was to take the blood of the bull with a finger, and put some on the east side of the ark of the covenant which had the mercy seat on top of it. And then to put some on the mercy seat. He was to do this seven times, again perfection. He was making atonement so that he might be able to approach God. Atonement, my dad defined it this way: at-one-ment. Being at one with God. And to be able to approach God, we need to be at one with Him, but we're sinners. We fall short and that's why there was a sacrifice.

In Leviticus 7:11 and in Hebrews 9:22, we see that life is in the blood. And there is no forgiveness without the shedding of blood. So if life is in the blood of an individual; and Romans 6:23 tells us the wages of sin is death, then whatever has the life in it must be killed. The blood must be shed so that it dies. That's the wages of sin.

But once the high priest had done this, his sin was paid for, atoned for, he could now approach God. So since he could approach God; he

comes out of the holy of holies, through the holy place, out to the courtyard, he can now approach God, approach God on behalf of the people. That is when you take those two goats, cast lots or today we'd say flip a coin one would be a sin offering the other was the scapegoat. Or if you read it in the ESV, the goat of Azazel. What does that mean? A most literal translation-go to hell. You see he was going to put his hands on that goat, and lay the sins of all the people on that goat and then that goat would be driven out in the wilderness, to die in the wilderness, away from the people. The sin was removed from the camp, the sin was taken away to die. That goat was a substitutionary goat in place of us taking the sin away.

The other was sacrificed. And he would take the blood then of that goat, go back into the holy place, into the most holy place, and now make atonement for the people by again seven times putting blood on the mercy seat. When they left the most holy place, and I encourage you to look at your diagram, he then would put blood on the altar of incense making atonement for the people, where the priest would pray for them. He would put blood on the table of showbread with the bread of presence showing that God was present. But now atonement was made for the people, they are on the lamps. They're representing the light of the world. Atonement made for the people so that the needs of the people could come in. Not the people themselves, but the priest could bring their concerns in.

He then would go back out into the courtyard, and then he would wash, come back into the holy place, change back into the high priestly robes; the ones with the ephod, the gold and all of that. Come back out into the courtyard where the two rams; one for the priest and the priestly family the other for the people would be sacrificed as sin offerings; actual payment of sins for the people and the announcement that their sins were now forgiven.

It's complex. There is nothing simple about it. But it is very orderly, step by step by step by step. Because that is our God, a God of order not disorder. A God who is way up here, and we are way down here, because we're sinners and we fall short of His glory.

But now let's bring Jesus into the picture. Let's make Christ manifest. Again, using scripture and consider everything we've talked about. And now we go to the book of Hebrews. Hebrews chapter 9, verses 11 and 12. Listen to what the writer says; "But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent, not made with hands, that is, not of this creation He entered once all into the holy places. Not by the means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of His own blood thus securing an eternal redemption." Continuing on to Hebrews 9:24 "for Christ has entered not into holy places made with hands which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself now to appear before God on our behalf." Now you know why Ascension Day is important. Because Christ ascended into the most holy place, the very realm, house of God, the Father, Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. To do what? To appear on our behalf. We continue in Hebrews 9:28. "So Christ having been offered once to bear the sins of many will appear a second time not to deal with sin; but to save those who are eagerly waiting for Him."

He's coming back. And contrary to what many people believe where he's going to come back with the rapture, and then reign for 1000 years, and then leave for a little bit of time, and then come back again. The scripture tells us He's going to come back for a second time. He came first to Bethlehem. He's going to come back a second time, why? To get all of those who have put their faith in Him for their atonement, being made one with God.

So, Christ serves as our high priest but yet more. Matthew in the Gospel of Matthew our gospel reading this morning lays it out for us-that Christ, having been offered once to bear the sin of many; He went out of the city to die, to shed his blood, to descend into hell, to be that scapegoat or that goat to hell because life is in the blood. And Jesus shed His blood because there is no forgiveness without the shedding of blood. He shed His blood to pay my sin, to pay your sin. And now we can rightly, respectfully, reverently, approach almighty God, the God of creation, to worship Him in an orderly and a respectful, in a reverent manner. But

also we can come directly to Him in prayer, and the created and say to the Creator: Our Father, who art in heaven.

This is what atonement looks like. We're living it right now. We have no business being in God's house. Could the people go into that holy place that you see there on the Tabernacle? No, because sin separates us from God. Could the high priest, himself, go in to the most holy place? No, because sin separated him from God. He had to go through a whole regimen, to be atoned for so that he could go in to God. And when he did, he would go in on behalf of the people. So, Christ, our High Priest has gone on our behalf, both as Priest and as sacrifice.

Please remember that as you come to church to worship. Don't come like Nadab and Abihu. Come respectfully, orderly, reverent. Come recognizing who you are a poor miserable sinner, who Christ has redeemed. Then, as we come before His altar in prayer, dare I say smile, as we have the privilege, the honor, the right, through Jesus to say: our Father.

In our Savior's Name, Amen.